Music in the Classical and Romantic Eras

(MCGY2612) 6 credit points

Essay Topics

Choose **one** of the following essay topics from group A **or** group B. For those who select a topic from group A, the deadline for online submission is 2 May; group B essays are due on 30 May 2011. For instructions on length and submission procedures, see **Course Outline** §§ Assessment, Marking criteria & rubrics. This document also has links to assist you in the researching and writing process.

A: The Classical Era

- Many of the names used to define and describe musical periods are anachronistic. Examine the usage of the term 'classical' in relation to the music of the late eighteenth century. How has this impacted on our understanding of the period and those then active as composers? Consider the value of some alternative designations e.g. 'first Viennese modernism' (James Webster).

- Haydn is famous for the wit and humour of his music. Explore how these qualities are conveyed (you will need to contextualise this by discussing the conventions with/against which he was playing). How might these characteristics have impacted on his reception, particularly in the nineteenth century?

- Explore the similarities and differences in Mozart's treatment of *opera seria* and *opera buffa*. Choose a representative work of each genre, and compare them on the grounds of plot, characterisation, musical styles, formal organisation, etc. You may want to extrapolate to include some references to other composers active in opera around this period.

- Beethoven's music has been enormously influential, but arguably even more important has been the idea of Beethoven: the solitary genius, the archetype of the 'great artist', etc. How did the social situation of the composer differ from those active earlier in the eighteenth century? In what ways has the Beethoven legend distorted the historical and social actualities of the period (Vienna 1800-1825)?

B: The Romantic Era

- 'Why, over the hundred years between 1750 and 1850, did audiences stop talking and start listening?' (James H. Johnson, *Listening in Paris: A Cultural History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995): 1). This change in audience behaviour reflects changes in how music was understood. Explore some of these shifts in attitude, particularly focussing on the relationship to romantic aesthetics.

- Many composers in the nineteenth century aspired to write works which took up the challenges laid down by Beethoven in his nine symphonies. Choose one of the following composers and explore how his symphonic works responded to the Beethovenian legacy: Mendelssohn, Schumann, Brahms, Bruckner.

- 'Sonata deformation' theory (invented by James Hepokoski) is a way of analysing nineteenth-century works which seem to be in dialogue with some aspects of sonata form. Provide a critical appraisal of this approach, and explore how it might be used to parse one of the following works: Wagner, Overture to *Tannhäuser*; Liszt, *Orpheus*; Schumann, Fantasy in C major Op. 17, first movement.

- The idea of a polarity between German (instrumental, serious) music and Italian (vocal, entertaining) music is deeply engrained in our understanding of the nineteenth century. Explore the ramifications of this premise, focussing in particular on the extent to which these ideas can be seen to have influenced **either** the music and aesthetics of Wagner and Verdi, **or** the critical reception of their works.